

SB 400

SB 400 would increase the current number of nonresident big game combination licenses from 17,000 to 19,000. In many parts of Montana our elk populations are declining due to wolf predation and other factors. Two of the wilderness areas included in this bill are the Lee Metcalf, located in the Gallatin Canyon/Madison Range and the Absaroka-Beartooths, which borders Yellowstone National Park. It has been well documented the decline of the elk population in both of those areas, to the extent that the FWP Commission recently reduced the number of tags available in the Madison Range for the 2011 season.

In my testimony before the Senate Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee, I made two recommendations that I thought would have made this into an acceptable piece of legislation. First, I asked that the Lee Metcalf and Absaroka-Beartooths be excluded from the bill. Second, I recommended that the 2,000 wilderness pool come out of the existing pool of 17,000 nonresident big game combination licenses. This would have created a win-win scenario for all involved. The wilderness outfitters who testified would get what they wanted (a pool of licenses just for wilderness areas), the nonresident hunter who wishes to hunt wilderness areas would get what they wanted (a pool of licenses just for wilderness areas-thereby increasing their odds of drawing), and the resident hunter would get what they wanted (no additional nonresident big game combination licenses). Both the sponsor and the Montana Outfitter and Guides Association stated this was totally unacceptable to them, thereby validating my opinion that this was more about increasing the number of nonresident big game licenses than providing a pool of licenses for the wilderness outfitter.

At the time of my testimony, I was unaware of the total number of nonresident big game combination license applications that had been received by the Mar. 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. I have now found out that the number of applications was less than the 17,000 tag allotment. Every nonresident hunter or client of an outfitter, wilderness or otherwise, who applied by the Mar. 15<sup>th</sup> deadline will receive a big game combination license. It should be noted that any of the 17,000 licenses unsold thru the drawing process will be sold online on a first come, first serve basis. THEREFORE, THIS BILL WILL CREATE A SOLUTION FOR A PROBLEM THAT DOES NOT EXIST!!

SB 400 is nothing more than a blatant attempt by the outfitting industry to circumvent the passage of the I-161 initiative and create a de facto set aside license while at the same time creating an additional 2000 nonresident big game combination licenses in an attempt to enlarge their client base. Had the sponsor and MOGA expressed a willingness to create a win-win scenario, I believe a bill could have been drafted/amended in a way that would have been tolerable to the average hunter, but unfortunately they chose to draw a line in the sand.

WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT YOU TABLE THIS BILL BASED ON THE FACTS: THERE IS ALREADY AN EXCESS OF NONRESIDENT BIG GAME COMBINATION LICENSES THAT HAVE NOT BEEN APPLIED FOR THRU THE DRAWING PROCESS; IT WOULD CREATE ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON THE WILDLIFE RESOURCE; AND THE OVERCROWDING IT WOULD CREATE FOR THE RESIDENT MONTANA HUNTER.



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**From:** Tadej, Joleen  
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**Subject:** FWP - Mixed Bag For Nonresident Big Game License Applications

### **MIXED BAG FOR NONRESIDENT BIG GAME LICENSE APPLICATIONS**

A voter-approved price increase for some Montana nonresident hunting licenses likely resulted in about 1,200 big game combination licenses remaining for sale after the March 15 application deadline.

About 15,800 nonresidents applied for a total 17,000 big game or elk combination licenses for the upcoming season. That means that every hunter who applied for either the \$912 nonresident big game combination license, or the \$812 elk combo license, will receive one.

The remaining 1,200 nonresident big game combination licenses will be sold online only on a first-come first-served basis beginning April 18. The big game combo includes licenses to hunt elk, deer and upland game birds, and a season fishing license. The elk combo includes all of the same licenses except for deer.

"We're confident that we'll sell out again this year," said Hank Worsch, the license bureau chief for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. "People are already sending in applications trying to get a jump on things, but in the interest of fairness we'll return them and ask those folks to reapply because they essentially missed the original deadline."

Worsch stressed that the surplus nonresident big game and elk combination licenses will be sold only online and none will be accepted until April 18.

Meanwhile, more than 7,550 Montana's nonresidents applied for 4,600 combination deer licenses, which also saw a bump in price to \$542 for the upcoming season. Because only 4,600 deer combo licenses are available by Montana law, those licenses will be awarded via a lottery-like drawing set for April 11.

Last November, voters approved an initiative that moved 7,800 outfitter-sponsored big game and deer combination licenses to the general nonresident license category and increased the associated license fees. The fee increases include:

- a nonresident big game combination license fee of \$912, up from \$643;
- a nonresident deer combination license fee of \$542, up from \$343; and
- a nonresident elk combination license fee of \$812, up from \$593.

Nonresident hunters who wish to apply for one of the remaining big game combo or elk licenses must apply via the FWP website at [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov) beginning April 18.

The revenue generated by the increased license fees is earmarked for wildlife habitat conservation and public hunting access programs. The fee increases only apply to nonresident combination licenses. Other nonresident licenses are not affected.

Thirty-five years ago the Montana Legislature capped nonresident deer and elk combination licenses at 17,000.

In 1988 the Legislature added 6,000 nonresident deer licenses, and added 600 more in 1996.

In 1998 the nonresident elk combination license was created which freed up additional nonresident deer licenses.

In 2007, the Legislature added 300 nonresident Youth Sponsored Big Game Combination Licenses, which sold out in each of the past two years. House Bill 339 in this session if passed as is would eliminate the cap on these licenses.

In 2008 the requirement that nonresidents purchase a combination license prior to applying for/purchasing an antlerless elk license was eliminated. In 2010, 1,400 nonresidents purchased these antlerless licenses.

In 2009, the Legislature passed a law allowing nonresident college students attending college in Montana to purchase a nonresident hunting license at the resident sportsmen's license price. More than 350 were sold last year.

In 2009, the Legislature created the "Come Home to Hunt" program, which allows up to 1,000 nonresidents who once lived and hunted in Montana to return to hunt with a family member. Last year a total of 495 nonresidents took advantage of the program.

Totaling the above there may be between 27,000 and 28,000 nonresident deer and elk hunters this fall.

Senate Bill 136, which provides additional nonresident reduced priced licenses for individuals born in Montana, has a fiscal note assuming 3,399 additional hunters will take advantage of the reduced price license if the bill passes.

SB 400 would authorize the sale of 2,000 additional Nonresident Big Game Combination Licenses for use in Wilderness Areas, which would allow Montana to host over 29,000 nonresident deer and elk hunters annually.